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Citation: Mavin, Sharon (2006) Expectations of women in leadership and management - advancement through solidarity? In: Women in Leadership and Management. New horizons in management . Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, pp. 71-88. ISBN 9781845426460

Published by: Edward Elgar

URL: <https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/women-in-leadership-a...> <<https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/women-in-leadership-and-management>>

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**Advancement through sisterhood and solidarity behaviour: Why such expectations of  
senior women in management?**

BOOK CHAPTER for Edited Book published by Edward Elgar in the Cary Cooper Series,  
Women in Leadership and Management: A European Perspective, Editors Duncan McTavish  
and Karen Miller, Glasgow Caledonian in 2006

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**Word count without abstract = 7351**

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## **Advancement through sisterhood and solidarity behaviour: Why such expectations of senior women in management?**

### **Abstract**

This chapter explores how negative relations between women undermine assumptions of sisterhood and solidarity behaviour. The central issues under discussion are firstly, the attention to solidarity behaviour as a means of advancing women in management and the assumption that women will align themselves with other women. Secondly, the expectations of senior women in relation to other women in management and thirdly, raising negative relations and processes of female misogyny between women without creating a 'blame the women' perspective. The chapter draws upon narrative data from two UK organizations to challenge the approach of solidarity behaviour, problematize the Queen Bee concept and highlight processes of female misogyny on relations between women in management. The chapter argues that rather than recommending senior women as mentors and role models, whilst blaming them for being more male than men, there is a need to refocus on challenging and changing the overall gendered social order impacting on women in management. The chapter offers an opportunity to reconsider relations between women and to question how the gendered social order encourages and exacerbates differences between women.

### **Key Words**

Senior Women Management, Queen Bee, Solidarity Behaviour, Female Misogyny

## **Advancement through sisterhood and solidarity behaviour: Why such expectations of senior women in management?**

### **Introduction**

There has been relative success in developing a critical mass of women in middle management in the UK. However the overall profile of the woman manager has changed little in the last ten years. Women still earn less than men; gender segregation within management functions still remains (Davidson and Burke, 2000) and representation at senior and executive levels remains problematic, with only one woman CEO in the UK FTSE 100 list (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2003a). Research and interventions which challenge this position to advance women in management are, in general, based on principles and assumptions of sisterhood and solidarity behaviour. Sisterhood and solidarity behaviour assumes that women view other women as their natural allies regardless of hierarchical differences and that senior women view the 'women in management mantle' as their responsibility. However it is argued that solidarity behaviour may set expectations of senior women in management which cannot be fulfilled.

There are tensions in the way that women perceive senior women in management and the expectations that they hold of them. This is highlighted by contradictions in calls for sisterhood and solidarity whilst criticizing senior women as Queen Bees (Staines et al, 1973, Abramson, 1975) and through assumptions of solidarity behaviour neglecting the complexity of the socially constructed senior woman in management. Incongruity between the managerial and the gender role continues to effect how women in senior management view and are viewed by *other women* in the organization, often resulting in female misogyny. This chapter challenges the apparent positive and proactive assumptions of solidarity behaviour as a way of advancing women in management and raises the complex issue of negative relations between women in management.

The chapter offers subjective narratives from senior women in the UK Housing Sector and women management academics to explore senior women's views on leading the 'women in management mantle' and to highlight the complexity of relations between women. In order for women to advance in management, rather than recommending more senior women as mentors and role models through solidarity behaviour, whilst continuing to blame them for being more male than men, there is a need to refocus research and future action on raising awareness of the impact of female misogyny and out to challenge and change overall gendered structures, cultures and systems which continue to impact upon women in management.

### **Sisterhood and solidarity behaviour**

Women are now more prevalent in supervisory and middle management in the UK and as such this should have positively impacted upon the experiences of women in management. However this status quo of second place for women in middle management can become a comfortable place, protected and defended by both men and *women* in gendered organizations (Mavin, 2001). As a woman any move from this comfortable place into senior management becomes problematic. Whilst the presence of women in senior management is perceived as more of a direct challenge to male power in organizations (Davidson and Burke, 1994), it can also be portrayed as a beacon of hope for all women in the organization. However it is the crucial point when women aspire to or move into senior management which significantly destabilizes established gendered relations, gendered structures, systems and cultures for both men *and* women. It is at this juncture that women make the move from the majority of other women, either through ambition or by actual promotion. These processes of separation result in differing expectations and behaviours between women.

Considering the presence of women in middle management in the UK, Kanter (1977) argued that as the relative size of a minority group increased then members should begin to experience a reduction in stress and other performance measures while their opportunity to demonstrate competence and managerial potential should increase. Indeed, as the sex ratio becomes more balanced Kanter (1977) noted then minority members can become allies, form coalitions, affect the cultures of the group and develop support networks that enhance the chances of women's career advancement. These elements form the basis of solidarity behaviour.

Kanter's work has been significantly progressed with particular emphasis on networks and coalitions as elements of solidarity behaviour. McKeen and Burke (1996) draw attention to the need for role models so that more feminine ways of managing may be included in the acceptable behaviours for future senior roles. While Singh and Vinnicombe (2003b) see women Executive Directors as role models for women lower down in the organization. Senior women are often recommended to support, develop and to work to raise the profile of other women, enabling them to perhaps 'short cut' the otherwise painful journey into management and senior management.

Korabik and Abbondanza (2004) argue that solidarity behaviour in the context of women in management is multidimensional. Solidarity behaviour brings together processes of; forming alliances, collaborating, joining together with shared aims, a commitment to changing social structures for women at the collective not just the individual level and behaviours which demonstrate loyalty and gender awareness in managerial practice. They argue that their research contradicts previous 'Queen Bee' approaches of women failing to help one another and questioned senior women to determine the extent to which they help and support one another through solidarity behaviour. Korabik and Abbondanza's (2004) preliminary results suggest that women do display solidarity behaviour with mentoring, modifying organizational policies and supporting women's rights for example.

They conclude that solidarity behaviour occurs on an individual and group basis, both within and outside organizations, which includes all forms of ties and coalitions that women may form in organizational settings. Korabik and Abbondanza (2004) argue that whilst the total scope of solidarity behaviour has yet to be identified it is enacted by women acting as instruments of social change.

An assumption of sisterhood and solidarity behaviour contends that women will support and align themselves with other women. This assumption is implicit within those research studies which seek to explain the experiences and performance of women in management, recommending that women aspiring to or progressing within management should have proactive, visible and high profile senior women as role models and mentors and should belong to women's networks, developing coalitions with other women.

What is significant is that by promoting the need for senior women to be involved in such solidarity behaviour as a primary means to advance women in management, then women in management research has, in general, ignored and to some extent, perpetuated a 'cover up' of negative relations *between* women in management. Many studies of women in management have tended to look to senior women in management, either recommending that they do more to help other women, (see Mavin and Bryans, 2002, McKeen and Burke, 1996; Singh et al, 2000; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2003a) or blame them for becoming honorary men (see Gini, 2001), or both. Such research is underpinned by the implicit assumption that women will support and align themselves with *other* women. The solidarity approach is questioned as the complexity of women's experiences in senior management and negative relations between women are raised and explored.



## **Are women in management natural allies?**

Negative relations between women in organizations have been highlighted in different arenas since the 1960s (see Abramson, 1975; Goldberg, 1968; Legge, 1987; Nicolson, 1996; Staines et al, 1973). Legge's (1987) position is that women fail to exploit their potential power in organizations resulting in women failing to build alliances with their natural allies, other women. But do women view other women as their natural allies in management?

There is evidence to suggest that women in organizations find it difficult to relate to women in senior management and that their reactions to senior women perpetuate divisions between them. Nieva and Gutek (1981) argue that the price extracted from women even peripherally included in a predominantly male work group includes a willingness to turn against other women, to ignore disparaging remarks about women and to contribute to the derogation of other women. Also 'women are still more likely than men to be disloyal to their same-sex colleagues' (Greer, 2000, p. 394).

As a context to women's views of senior women in management, O'Leary and Ryan (1994) argue that women in senior management are role-deviant and that when women encounter women at work, their normative expectations of one-another illustrate sex-role spill over at its worst. Women do not have consciously articulated norms for boss-subordinate interactions when the boss is a woman and therefore it is not surprising that women at work tend to react to women bosses as women and to men bosses as bosses. For example, 'women subordinates expect their women bosses to be more understanding, more nurturant, more giving and more forgiving than men' (O'Leary and Ryan, 1994, p. 72). Therefore suspicion and equivocation from other women can be used to fuel the belief that women are unsuitable for certain positions because other people, including women, do not want to work for or to deal with women managers or professionals (Marshall, 1984, p. 97).

Powell and Butterfield, (2003) agree that there is incongruity between the managerial role and senior women's gender role in terms of self-concept,

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If women conform to the gender role by displaying predominately feminine characteristics, they fail to meet the perceived requirements of the managerial role, which calls for mostly masculine characteristics. However if they compete with men for managerial positions and conform to the managerial role by displaying predominately masculine characteristics, they fail to meet the requirements of the female gender role, which calls for deference to the authority of men (Powell and Butterfield, 2003, p. 92).

The assumption of women as natural allies is particularly problematic once a woman destabilises the established gendered order by moving into senior management. The nature of senior management for women and the behaviours and actions required to gain entry and remain within this environment do little to sustain notions of sisterhood or solidarity behaviour. Indeed Wacjman (1998) argues that there is not much room at the top for women and that successful women are not so much representatives of, as exiles from, their sex. Senior women are therefore isolated from other women. Wacjman (1998) explains that as organizations are a crucial site for the ordering of gender and for the establishment and preservation of male power then similarities between women and men who have achieved senior management positions far outweigh any differences between women and men as groups.

'Women's presence in the world of men is conditional on them being willing to modify their behaviour to become more like men or to be perceived as more male than men' (Wacjman, 1998, p. 7-8). Maier (1999, p. 89) agrees, arguing that men and women recruited into dominance within organizations tend to internalise the requirements of the position, becoming like men. Coates (1998, p. 9) argues 'the corporate crusade, its strategy and mechanisms, are more subtle than anything experienced earlier in the management of organizations. As a result individuality and femininity have been sacrificed'.

Women cannot win in this situation. Women managers face the contradictory demands of being feminine and business-like (Wacjman, 1998, p. 7-8). They cannot join as a woman and once they start to behave like a man, they cannot be a 'proper woman' (Maddock, 1999). All tokens face the same predicament, how to lose their exaggerated visibility and win the group's acceptance.

Organizations implicitly, extensively and consistently favour the masculine worldview, whether they realise it or not, rewarding those who conform to it and marginalising or subordinating those men and women alike who don't (Cheng, 1996); men's worldviews mesh neatly with the social order of organization, whereas those of women tend to clash with it (Maier, 1999, p. 89).

If you are a senior woman and your peer group are men then it is difficult not to develop behaviours and style congruent with 'fitting in' (Bryans and Mavin, 2003) and acceptance. This incongruity between the managerial and the gender role effects how women in senior management view and are viewed by *other women* in the organization. Such incongruity challenges those approaches to advancing women in management which continue to mask this complexity whilst promoting sisterhood and solidarity behaviour.

### **Queen bee or each woman for herself...?**

Assumptions of sisterhood and solidarity behaviour also underpin those studies proposing that women in senior management have not paved the way for other women. Rather than such research challenging the gendered structures and cultures of senior management, women are blamed for becoming more male than the men. Gini (2001) argues that women are not very nice and this is why we do not like them... The argument is that those few women who have broken through the glass ceiling have done so not by embracing feminism but by outperforming men on their own terms: classic careerists who happen to be women.

Gini (2001) argues that some of these successful women are more combative and ruthless than their male counterparts because they feel they have to prove they can be rough, tough and resilient. Known as the 'only bra in the room syndrome', characteristics of these types of achievers is their lack of empathy and support of other working women, especially their subordinates. 'Having achieved success by playing hardball and working hard, they expect the same from others' (Gini, 2001, p. 99).

Such studies present senior women as more 'male than men,' for 'pulling up the ladder' or the 'drawbridge' for other women having reached senior levels, therefore creating further barriers to keep women in their place in management. Starr (2001) highlights this and comments on the names used for senior women in her research, 'various derogatory names were levelled at these women: the honorary blokes, the men in skirts, traitors to the cause – the individuals being viewed as having relinquished feminist agendas and 'sisterhood' in the pursuit of masculine policy agendas which, while bestowing personal benefits, exclude women in general' (Starr, 2001, p. 9).

These perceptions of senior women also perpetuate the use, or misuse, of the term Queen Bee (Abramson, 1975) to label senior women in management. Staines et al (1973) offered the label 'Queen Bee' in their early study concerned with women's attitudes towards women's liberation, finding that some women were actively opposed to any changes in traditional sex roles and were anti-feminist. Abramson (1975) used the term 'Queen Bee' to describe women who had already gained prominence in management but who tended to deny that there was systematic discrimination against women. These values were held because if women admitted there was systematic discrimination against other women it would undermine their own level of achievement.

Abramson (1975) argued that while few women were willing to recognise the problem of gender inequality, fewer still were willing to do anything about it, so that Queen Bees would not accept that women who are capable of a management career are unable to progress due to discrimination.

The Queen Bee argument has made a come back as a means of describing senior women's 'bad behaviour' and has done little to foster positive relations between women in management. It perpetuates women in management as a 'one-woman responsibility'. Polarised with solidarity behaviour, 'Queen Bee' approaches ignore the complex gendered processes within organization and the gendered subjectivities of senior women, resulting in the perpetuation of sex role stereotyped expectations of senior women; the assumption that senior women should be representatives of other women in management and responsible for their advancement remains unquestioned.

Kanter (1977) argues that one way to minimize uncertainty in the executive suite is to close top management positions to people who are regarded as 'different'. Thus women have a difficult time in entering top management positions because they are seen as different by male incumbents (Kanter, 1977). Indeed 'a woman leader is not viewed as androgynous or as undifferentiated from her male counterparts. She is viewed as a woman who is a leader. In recognising women leaders as women, we know that they become more visible and enjoy a broader scope to their visibility than do their male counterparts' (Adler, 1999, p. 259). Some women who enter male-dominated fields may try to assimilate (fit in by acting like the men in the in-group), whereas others may experience marginalisation (feel isolated and like out-group members). Both of these options can result in a number of undesirable consequences (Korabik, 1999, p. 15). If as a senior woman you do not lead on the women in management mantle, if you do not conform to a feminine model and you develop commonalities with your peer group, who will be mostly men, then you may be vilified for not representing the interests of women and for becoming more male than the men.

However Starr (2001) argues that the 1970s femocrat slogan that you should 'lift as you climb' (to support and mentor other women in their careers) has diminished. 'At the beginning of a new century, organizational restructuring has created a more male dominated and competitive institution which means that 'it's each woman for herself' (Starr, 2001, p. 9).

Significantly whilst there is a wealth of research exploring the gendered nature of organization at senior levels and elsewhere in management, there appears to be difficulty in reconciling senior management as a masculine, gendered place that senior women have to continually learn to survive with the expectations of senior women in promoting and progressing women in management issues, whilst not becoming a man or Queen Bee. Sisterhood and solidarity behaviour therefore sets expectations of senior women which cannot be fulfilled.

### **Senior women and the women in management mantle**

Fundamental to solidarity behaviour is the assumption that senior women should and do view the 'women in management' mantle as their responsibility. However, Mattis (1993) argues that women directors want to be recognised for their talents and abilities, not as representatives of the interests of women. While Rindfleish (2000) in her Australian study of women in senior management argues that as women are heterogeneous they cannot be stereotyped as Queen Bees but in contrast they do not want the responsibility for leading on the advancement of women in management. Rindfleish (2000) found that the majority of senior women in her study believed that there are barriers to women's progress in management but disagreed as to the nature of the barriers, what their responsibility is to change them and were not keen to be responsible for removing them. These senior women did not view sisterhood and solidarity behaviour as their responsibility and why should they?

## **Female misogyny**

Previous research has explored women in management by analysing gendered relations between men and women but there is a lack of primary research exploring negative relations between women in management. It is very difficult to uncover and explore these negative relations without falling into yet another 'blame the women' standpoint. However in order to problematize the approach of solidarity behaviour as a means of advancing women in management and to support a refocusing of research to challenge gendered organization, the concept of female misogyny is explored.

In thinking about how men feel about women, the history of misogyny is well known and can be traced back through myths of Western civilization to the first woman (whether she is known as Eve or Pandora) who unleashed evil and misery into the world (Glick et al, 1997). Misogyny is generally understood as men's hatred of women and a misogynist as a hater or distruster of women, with the common use referenced to men's behaviours towards women, as intense dislike or enmity and hostility. This hostility can manifest itself in a number of ways, for example, as antagonism, unfriendliness, resentment, aggression, lack of sympathy and opposition. There are varying degrees of misogyny, with male chauvinism understood as prejudiced loyalty to one's cause, group or sex and a male chauvinist as exhibiting prejudiced behaviour against or inconsideration of women.

Applying such understandings to relations between women enables the concept of 'female misogyny' to emerge as a means to describe the manifestations of negative relations between and towards other women. It follows that there are varying degrees of female misogyny, with female chauvinism and female chauvinists interpreted as women who are prejudiced against or inconsiderate of other women.

Other manifestations more readily discussed and explicitly enacted, are behaving as a 'bitch' towards other women, being a 'spiteful woman', speaking scathingly, being territorial towards other women, being unfair to other women and intolerant of other women's disloyalty. Female jealousy is also commonly recognised as envy of other women's advantage. Starr (2001, p. 9) notes,

Extract            Competition between women may go deeper than professional rivalry, to include sub-conscious jealousy and competition based on age or appearance (attractiveness, weight, dress sense). This suggests that at times women may read each other's sexed bodies through men's eyes in sexual competition. At other times the perception of separation and competition is explained in work related terms through factors such as intellectual ability, professional connections, reputation etc. Furthermore, unlike the more open forms of hostility exhibited by men, women observe that competition or opposition from women is more likely to manifest as passive resistance.

In terms of women's behaviour towards women in senior management, Wacjman (1998) argues that many *women* undermine women's authority and notes that various constructions of femininity which women deploy in relating to men in power, involving being flirtatious, admiring and generally supportive actively, reconstitute heterosexualised forms of dominance and subordination. Therefore women find it difficult to deal with senior women because the strategies they are accustomed to using with men are inappropriate for women. Wacjman (1998) contends that as women have internalised gender hierarchies, it seems almost proper for a man to be in a superior position. In the case of senior men the related power is eroticised and this complex intertwining of power with sexuality means that senior women who are powerful provoke anxieties and ambivalence in *women* as well as men.



Whilst there is a lack of research concerning how female misogyny manifests and how it relates to women in management, it may provide a means of exploring and explaining relations between women in order to challenge assumptions of solidarity behaviour and refocus action on challenging existing gendered structures, processes and cultures which sustain the status quo.

Several issues emerge from these debates. Firstly the challenge to solidarity behaviour underpinned by the assumption that women align themselves with other women as a means of advancing women in management; secondly the expectations of senior women in relation to advancing other women in management and whether these are appropriate and realistic and thirdly, raising negative relations and processes of female misogyny between women without creating another 'blame the women' perspective.

### **The research approach**

The chapter draws upon subjective narrative data from two separate research projects; the role of senior women in raising gender issues in the UK Housing Sector in the North East of England (Mavin and Lockwood, 2004) and women's place and identity within a UK Business and Management Higher Education organization (Mavin, 2001). The data was collected through interviews and those specific to this chapter were conducted in 2003 and 1999-2000 respectively. Both projects followed a similar methodology underpinned by feminist standpoint principles of women's experience as a basis of research; the researcher as accountable to participants and community; consideration of personal as political and a reflexive perspective (Griffin, 1995). Individual case studies of women were developed using biographical semi-structured interviews to produce subjective narrative texts. Changing the names of all participants has ensured anonymity, whilst reflexivity was integrated through transcript distribution to participants and by engaging critical friends at the interpretation stage of the research.

Narrative extracts from eight individual women's case studies, four from each research project, have been included to illustrate how women seek to make sense of their experiences in organization and to highlight both the Queen Bee concept and processes of female misogyny. Narrative is an appropriate interpretative lens for understanding processes of micro-political activity, one means by which ideas and practices are legitimated (Currie and Brown, 2003, p. 564). This is particularly valuable for shedding light on aspects of individual and group sense making; sense making being understood to refer to those processes of interpretation and meaning production whereby people reflect on and interpret phenomena and produce inter-subjective accounts (Leiter, 1980 in Currie and Brown, 2003). The narratives included here are part of a broader authorial strategy and have been presented to have a particular effect on readership (Denzin, 1994, Currie and Brown, 2003). The first narratives question the assumption of senior women taking on the women in management mantle while the second explore negative relations between women.

### **Views from senior management: the 'queen bees'?**

Narratives from women at Executive Director level in the UK Housing Sector from four organizations in the Northeast of England support Gini's (2001) argument that women who have broken through the glass ceiling have done so by outperforming men on their own terms and their responses would historically have fallen within Abramson's (1975) description of a Queen Bee. When asked about women and the glass ceiling Anne said,

"What sort of evidence have they got? Have they applied for one job and not got it?

Well that's my point about no matter who you are or what level you've got to be resilient. If you want to get to the top you have to be resilient about getting knocked back, I think it's too easy to blame the glass ceiling."

Louise commented,

"Glass ceiling... women need to learn there are various ways to crack it... they need dogged perseverance and persistence."

The women's perceptions of whether they worked harder than those men in similar executive roles, provides a context to their other responses. Kate explains,

"I know I am striving to prove myself all of the time, so yes I have to work harder."

Louise comments,

"When I was in my previous job I was definitely doing a better job than the men but I always knew I would have to work harder and perform better just to get accepted - which is grossly unfair. Male mediocre performance is OK, female mediocre performance at that level is not OK, if we are mediocre they are onto our case, if it's men they get away with it."

In terms of their management style as senior women, becoming more 'male than men' was recognised as an issue. Kate said,

"I swear more now than I used to. I guess I have sometimes fallen into that... my temper and raising my voice and swearing. I have bitterly regretted it since and it's one of the things I have got a problem with, because it doesn't feel natural to me, I really don't like being like that so then I have gone around and apologised to people."

Elaine responded,

"You have to behave more like a man though to be accepted, it's not right and it would be nice to be accepted for what you are rather than what they want you to be."

Louise highlighted the problems related to fitting in,

"I soon learned that to be accepted I needed to become one of the boys and started swearing and drinking with them. When men cracked sexist jokes, I laughed with them, even though it goes right under my skin, I knew to survive I had to play the game...their game. I even took up golf...I was known as the honorary man. You also have to play to men's rules otherwise they just won't let you in. People are critical when you assume male traits...they call you bossy and arrogant, all the negative adjectives, but men who behave this way are seen as strong leaders etc."

In this study, when the women Directors were asked about their perceptions of gender discrimination facing women in management and their views on their responsibility for challenging and changing this. Kate said,

"Getting women to the top is not seen as a priority and that's probably because the decisions are largely men's and they don't see it as a priority! I don't think we will be doing anything proactively to recruit women though, whether we spend more opportunity developing the women we have would be interesting. I wouldn't feel right leading on the issue... not because I don't believe in it but my priorities lie elsewhere. I don't feel passionately enough about it and I do need to feel passionate about something to lead on something. Having said that I recognise it though and I think there are things that can be done without necessarily going to the barricades... I hope that's not a cop out?"

Anne said,

"I keep coming back to the thing about not being pole axed by rejection and knock backs and I think that's the most significant thing and that's not just confined to women but women do succumb more and it's the self esteem thing and their self esteem is knocked and we don't try again."

Louise commented,

"There are not enough women in positions of influence, that's why nothing has changed...men don't like women at the top they prefer them to be submissive. We at the top have to influence and change things - alter the male resistance...women have a responsibility to give women more opportunities...its about discreet discrimination - its not on not to help women - its not a level playing field and women need a leg up."

Elaine responded,

"I think the only way it would be changed is if women were more assertive about it and I don't think we are and I don't think we fight our corner very well. I think as a group we should raise our profile as men won't do it for us. If I was asked to take responsibility for leading gender change within the current management team I would be anxious...quite anxious...one woman out of three."

Throughout the interviews the women identified experiences where they were faced with majority male audiences, feeling uncomfortable, exclusion, inadequacy and having to 'psyche' themselves up for occasions, but were reluctant to ascribe this to any form of gendered experience.

They preferred to blame themselves in terms of inadequacy or low self-esteem and identified women's lack of confidence, including their own, as an issue for women in management. They admired male confidence, not competence, and men's self-belief in their own ability. Like Rindfleish's (2000) study, the women described barriers they had faced to varying degrees, and without exception thought the current lack of women at the top to be unacceptable and disappointing but inevitable. One thought women at the top have a responsibility to help other women whilst others thought women had to help themselves by being more confident and persistent and were reluctant to offer women a 'leg up.' The women were not inclined to engage in solidarity behaviours; they wanted to be recognised for their talents, abilities and knowledge and *not* as representatives of women.

None were prepared to lead on gender issues or to be seen to be visibly supporting women in management. These narratives highlight the difficult 'fitting in' processes of joining senior management and the impact of this on the expectation of solidarity behaviour or sisterhood in relation to other women in management. The senior women do recognise the issue of becoming more male than men but are reluctant to take on the women in management mantle; this is a central dilemma.

Championing women's issues is not a mainstream strategic role valued by most organizations and until it is, why have such expectations of senior women? Men *and* women label women who hold the women in management mantle as the 'token feminist,' enabling a further undermining of women's roles and managerial identities. Simply the threat of being labelled as such leaves senior women feeling uneasy. Assumptions of sisterhood and solidarity behaviour should be revisited to explore the context in which senior women operate and their resulting gendered subjectivities, to make transparent this complexity and to highlight why such expectations of them may be unrealistic.

## **Women academics and processes of female misogyny**

Taken from a research project exploring women's identity and place in organization, narratives from interviews with women who were management academics at Principal Lecturer grade and below (Mavin, 2001) highlight how processes of female misogyny between women manifests within a UK Business and Management Higher Education organization. The analysis discussed here centres on the women participant's contradictory behaviours and attitudes towards Martha, who emerged as a predominant character in the women's narratives and towards senior women academics.

Martha was described by women participants as 'the only (woman) legend' in the organization's history, which was the most complimentary description or as a woman who was 'too sexy for her own good'. Resulting from her overt sexuality, Martha was perceived by the academic women as having done 'a lot of damage' to how women in the organization were viewed. The enactment of female misogyny emerges as stories about Martha are told highlighting a lack of sisterhood or solidarity behaviour.

When asked to talk about the heroes, heroines and villains in the organization Barbara commented,

"There is one female legend, [Martha]. Everybody I met brought her into conversations, talking about the impact she had on the organization. She was too feminine for her own good and people did not know how to handle her and there was some jealousy. Both men and women brought her into the conversation. She is a legend because she networked and used power and influence that was the legend. I heard a lot of stories, people burned to talk about her so she left a kind of mark. To the people this was negative."

When asked what were the important stories in the organization Tania answered;

"[Martha] stories, I was able to ridicule her. She used to wear short skirts, skimpy things, short and obscene but the day after she had her interview when she didn't get the job she came into the tea room, and said 'what the fuck do you have to do to get on in this place?' Stories about her sitting with her legs crossed in a mini skirt on the desk in front of students, she had said doesn't it make you feel good when all your students fancy you. I used to think what a silly cow who does she think she is, she used to do the rounds - she targeted people who were influential and she probably meant 'who the fuck.'"

Sonia replied,

"She [Martha] didn't help the acceptance of women in the organization. She put women back a few years and as she was so prolific and up front they didn't realise that there were serious implications for women. I think she was dangerous and she wasn't popular."

While Vicky said;

"All the men in the organization were sucked into it. She [Martha] was a plausible character, she could make everyone think she could do her job well, you could see her coming a mile off, sitting at the desk with her legs wide open. She got a male student to write her testimonial for her but they didn't renew her contract."

As a woman Martha challenged the dominant masculine culture in a way that had not been evident before, by using her sexuality explicitly.



In doing so Martha emerged as the organization's 'executive tart'; she could not be easily understood in terms of the existing constructions of woman or gendered structures and therefore could not be easily managed. In terms of the women's stories about her, these are interpreted as a manifestation of female misogyny demonstrating women's prejudice and antagonism towards other women. Martha destabilised the established sexual order within the organization and was rejected by both men and *women*; left without a place in the organization.

These narratives evidence the arguments of Starr (2001) and Wacjman (1999), that women and their sexuality destabilise gender stereotypes and organization. When this happens it is clear within this research that it is not sisterhood and solidarity behaviours but processes of female misogyny which come to the fore. Martha was not a senior woman but was attempting to gain a fulltime post in a way which challenged the other women's perceptions of their stable gendered order. 'Women express both surprise and disappointment at having to contend with opposition from women as well as men in their roles. It is a statement about women's learnt devaluation of the whole category of 'woman'' (Starr, 2001, p. 10).

Female misogyny is also evident in the perceptions of women academics regarding senior women within the organization. In comparison to their discussions of Martha, the academic women expected solidarity behaviour from senior women in the organization and were disappointed when this was not evident. The women discussed the senior women as 'honorary men' with masculine behaviours and traits and their narratives revealed feelings of being 'let down'. The token senior women were perceived as not being there to support or mentor other women; they were not arguing their cause and had become in some instances, more male than the men (Mavin, 2001).

Through their narratives the women demonstrated disappointment with the senior women in that they perceived a lack of, what has been described here as sisterhood or solidarity behaviour, from the top down. Holding this view, the token women should have changed the culture and fought their battles for them, as women, retaining their identity as women.

Tania talked about what helped and hindered women in the culture on referring to the two women Heads of Department said,

“I don’t think we have anybody in position who is prepared to sponsor women...I have no respect for the AB’s [a woman Head of Department] models of management and CD [a woman Principal Lecturer] has now abandoned the people she canvassed to get promoted and I can’t do that, its not the way I work.”

When discussing management behaviours, Samantha said,

“You can begin to believe that she [a woman Head of Department] and potentially EF [a woman Principal Lecturer] demonstrate male confidence and self promotion. A perfect example was when EF, when the new Head of Personnel was announced, went straight to external relations to tell them about her relationship with them and she has gone straight to the VC on other occasions even though I told her the information in the first place, she bypassed me and went straight to the top.”

On discussing a woman Head of Department Vicky commented,

“Someone who had been in a senior management development session with AB [a woman Head of Department] discussing participation had nearly choked because AB can’t put it into practice and reinforce it.”

Commenting on a new woman Principal Lecturer being appointed from outside Sandra said,

“This is the virtual superwoman coming in. I fully expected her to be a leading academic who I could have a lot of respect for as she would be superior to me...the reality did not match the expectation. I got the impression that academically she was far superior but if you look at her CV she won't be entered into the RAE.”

The senior women were perceived in the same way as the senior men, neither group was respected by the women academics. The behaviours of senior women were perceived as male and reinforced the women's ideas of what types of identities are needed when you move into senior management, legitimising why they did not want to move into first place.

Here processes of female misogyny succeed in disassociating women in senior management from other women and perpetuate the gendered order by socially constructing senior management for women. In this research senior management becomes a 'bad place', evidenced not least by the male behaviour and management style required and the superwoman status needed to sustain it, but also because as a woman you become a man and you will be undermined by and face antagonism from *women* as well as men.

When women experience female misogyny it is worse somehow than misogyny, as we are put in our place by women who disassociate themselves from us because as women we are in or aspire to senior positions (Mavin, 2001). In this research, not only are women in senior management in competition with men and women, but they also have to face antagonism or similar from men and *women* in the organization. Specifically from those women who feel uncomfortable that senior women have destabilised the established gendered order by moving place, becoming more 'male than the men' and by not using their senior management position to fight the way for other women.

## **Emergent themes**

Assumptions underpinning sisterhood and solidarity behaviour are problematic both for senior women and other women in organization. The narratives of senior women presented here support Rindfleish's (2000) study in that they recognise that there are barriers facing women in management but they do not feel comfortable in taking responsibility for the women in management mantle. The narratives also highlight that these senior women recognise the taking on of male behaviours in order to fit in to senior management. However, developing research and interventions which remain focused upon the role of senior women in advancing women will not challenge or change the organizational structures and gender cultures which socially construct the experiences of women in management.

The narratives of academic women highlight negative relations between women. Reactions to Martha as a woman who wanted to join the organization full time but who was perceived as using her sexuality too overtly demonstrates how processes of female misogyny undermine assumptions of solidarity behaviour across organizational hierarchies. The same women were then seen to engage in processes of female misogyny, upwards towards senior women for not retaining their femininity and for not taking on the women in management mantle. Therefore expectations of solidarity behaviour from women do not hold across organizational boundaries or up, down and across hierarchical structures.

The different manifestations of female misogyny highlight the contradictory places women take in relation to other women and raise questions about women as 'natural allies' and of the notion of sisterhood and solidarity behaviour for women in management. However it is important to note that these debates should not be interpreted as another 'blame the women' position. Queen Bee characteristics and processes of female misogyny emerge from the complex way in which gender order is embedded, socially constructing everyday experiences for women.

The significant issue which requires further research is the way in which this privileged gendered social order encourages and exacerbates differences between women in order to prevent opposition in the form of an ordered coalition of women's interests. This is not to point to orchestrated behaviours but rather to identify implicit gendered assumptions which foster difference and fragmentation which is, after all, easier to dismiss than joint action.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored how less positive relations between women undermine assumptions of sisterhood and solidarity behaviour and has re-presented narratives from women Directors and management academics in the UK to highlight the complexity of female misogyny between women and why expectations of sisterhood and solidarity behaviour are problematic.

The narratives from women Directors in the Housing Sector highlighted why we should refocus future research concerning women in management. Rather than recommending more senior women in mentoring and role models, while at the same time 'blaming' them for being more male than men, there is a need to focus future action on challenging and changing the overall gendered structures and systems in place affecting all women in organization. The narratives from women academics reveal negative relations between women in organization and raise female misogyny as a gendered process which fragments notions of sisterhood and solidarity. Future action research processes which engage women in senior *and* other levels in management in consciousness raising to the context in which they are operating and the impact *women have on other women* is a way forward and presents a unique challenge to advancing women in management. Enabling such consciousness raising and transparency between women in management is crucial in order to challenge established gender order. The alternative is to maintain the status quo for women in management by continuing with a veneer or pretence of sisterhood and solidarity behaviour whilst as women we continue to 'fight amongst ourselves'.

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